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CHRIST OR ECCLESIASTES

SERMONS PREACHED IN

S. Paul's Cathedral

BY THE REV.

H. S. HOLLAND, M.A.

CANON AND PRECENTOR OF ST. PAUL'S

"That which is done is that which shall be done: there is no new thing under the sun."—ECCLES. i. 9.

"And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."—REV. xxi. 5.

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"—2 COR. v. 17.

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P R E F A C E

EVERY educated man must be sensitive of the strain laid by miracle upon the scientific and critical methods of knowledge with which education makes him familiar; and he must know the sound of the whisper which invites him to ease the strain, by surrendering the supernatural setting of the faith, and falling back on its "spiritual content."

It is, therefore, needful for us all to seriously ask ourselves where we should find ourselves if we listened to this whisper. Should we find ourselves facing a world of uniform laws and coherent aims?

Or should we rather find that, in surrendering the level of the supernatural, we had dropped down to a point of view from which human life ceased any longer to form a rational whole, or to make towards an intelligible end ?

It would seem so ; for it is becoming every day more evident that those very scientific methods, to which we propose to sacrifice the supernatural, are confessedly and hopelessly at fault in handling the personal life of the moral will. They name themselves Agnostic ; they abandon, that is, all claim to interpret that world of ultimate reality in which alone the human will can live and move and breathe. To fall back within their limitations is necessarily to retreat within the sad reserve, the joyless shadows, of the

Preacher. If we are ever to escape this desperate alternative, it can only be by discovering in the supernatural, as it is in Christ Jesus, no intellectual encumbrance, but rather the very key by which alone life is rationalized, and the spirit in us set free to think, and work, and grow.

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HOPE

“For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.”—ECCLES. ii. 22, 23.

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”
—ST. MATT. v. 4.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”—ST. MATT. xi. 28.

Hope

“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.”—ISA. i. 6.

THAT is our Christian answer, complete and sufficient, to every riddle which life can ever present to us. Is it the riddle of social progress, of human destiny? Surely, indeed, we need some answer to that, as we look out upon an earth that, in spite of all our best efforts, is still full of darkness and cruel habitations. What fruit comes of it all? What hand is holding control? Each step forward in civilisation, in education, does but thrust this question on us in a sharper form; does but open out new weaknesses, till now unsuspected; does but force up strange defaults, hitherto

overlooked. Defect dogs us ; and each defect becomes more serious, more urgent, more alarming, as the conditions become more complex and delicate. Each misdirection shows itself more fatal ; each act of forgetfulness or of ignorance proves more criminal or more bloody. The further we go, the more rooted the evil ; the more desperate the entanglement. Each rift gapes wider. The movement is indeed forward, progressive ; yet always there comes with it the disclosure of some blunder it is too late to retrieve, some failing that has already passed beyond redress. The end, if there be an end to be discovered, grows ever more and more hopelessly remote. Never, surely, was it harder to define and portray any direct and wholesome and happy end of civilisation than now, when we seem to have got so far on the road.

What is the end to be ? What is the goal to

which all moves? Everywhere men are becoming hopeless. We seem caught in the recoil from those high hopes which the first wonderful outbreak of new scientific knowledge had roused into activity. As we read the last words of Agnostic philosophy, still blandly promising an equilibrium to be reached, in some far day, between man and his environment, it sounds to us like a bad stroke of satire, like a jest in a sick man's ear. Equilibrium! perfect adaptation!—what despair lies in the very ring of the complacent phrases, as we look round on a world which seems to have set itself to give them the lie—a world that every day has some fresh discovery to make to us of disproportion, misadaptation, disorder, confusion,—a world that seems bent on thwarting its own success, on distorting its own hopes, on disturbing its own balance, on traversing its own calculations. “Equilibrium!”

Is science, with its claim to positive, plain, common-sense teaching, going to put us off, at an hour of urgency, of agony, with this vague dream of an ideal, that, some centuries hence, may, under other skies than our beclouded heaven, become perhaps conceivable? Better than that, the grim utterances of a harder Materialism, which tells us that we live in face of Nature, as men throwing dice for our lives against a great Angel who cannot lose, and cares not much to win ; and that, in such a case, it is well and wise to take good care that we know the rules of the game. This advice, if we can face its horrible rigour, at least gives us a present rule, a practical system ; but then, in doing so, it abandons all idea of any given, professed, directed end, to which we travel.

Life is a blind game in the dark. We must make the best of it. That is all it can say.

With teeth set, with heads bent, with wills tough as iron, we are to battle our way against this interminable pressure of outward forces, that makes against our survival. So the ideal vanishes. Purpose, plan, meaning, significance, such is not to be found in things. Whether there be any fruit of the long travail, whether any hope be set before us, whether any golden gate will ever open to welcome this sick and weary race of men, whether they will ever catch sight of any shining walls or crystal waters, whether any rest at all remaineth into which they may pray at last to enter,—all this is to be wiped out of our thoughts, out of our hearts. Such fancies are childish and impertinent. We can spare no time for idle imaginations. No time, indeed, to spare; for ever that dreadful game of chance proceeds, which is played between us and the

powers without us,—ever over against us stands that awful Angel, and the next throw that we make is for our very lives.

So they tell us. And is that, then, the last message of a Science which opened with such large promises? No wonder that men are daily growing more disheartened and angry, who looked to Science to give them bread, and are offered only this stone.

And it is “to us,” in this our dismal plight,—“to us,” as we grow wild and furious, like beasts caught in a snare,—“to us,” as we begin to wonder whether the entire movement of human life has not, by some evil inspiration, gone after some false scent, taken some terrible misdirection, shut itself up in some blind path that arrives at no goal and has no outlook,—“to us,” so heavily labouring, so drearily entangled, so pitifully bewildered, and so faintly hoping,—

“to us” as we walk on still in darkness, and seem nearing the very shadow of death,—“to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given.” We are promised “a Child,” Who shall be the true issue, the justification, the consummation, of all this our long and weary story;—“a Son,” Who shall be, Himself, the goal of our pilgrimage, the fulfilment of our imperfection, the fruit of our labour, the crown of our endurance, the honour of our service, the glory of our building.

Here, in this Son of His, is an offer made by God, by which He pledges Himself to justify all suffering, retrieve all failure, redeem all fault. He gives us an end for which to live, a purpose to which to consecrate ourselves. Here is His Mind, here is His Plan, for us—for us, not in our small individual worries and troubles only, but for us, in the mass, as a race, as a society, as

a civilisation. God has a scheme, an issue prepared—for which He worketh hitherto; and that issue is to be “His own Son.” In Him all will be gathered in and fulfilled. “And the government shall be upon His shoulder; and of His kingdom there shall be no end; and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Prince of Peace.” Therefore we may not faint or fear. All, we may be sure, is in hand; nothing is wasted: nothing is lost: nothing is in vain. Towards that Divine event all is ever moving. The Hand that shaped leviathan as a plaything, and takes up the mountains as a very little thing—that Hand governs, directs, controls. Its pressure is never removed. These tears we shed are all counted. These wanderings of ours lead towards an end. There is a rest which remaineth. Something is being brought about, something is

coming to pass,—something worthy, wonderful, and lovely. A city is being built, which God shall inhabit. A temple is rising, which shall be the House of God among men. Humanity is in pain, even as a woman in travail ; but, at last, the anguish will be all forgotten, for joy that “this Child is born, that this Son is given.”

Ah ! but can we believe it ? How can we make sure of this ? How can we get firm grip upon it ? It is a serious, a tremendous demand upon our faith. If we could but be assured that all this groaning pain were indeed tending towards this Divine consummation, then we might endure ; we might lay down our lives in peace ; we might quiet our anxious questionings. Beautiful, most beautiful, the great words of St. Paul, as he contemplates the vast expectation of the creature, and foresees the final glory in the perfected Christ, when

the adoption will be won—the redemption of all this weary creation,—and the entire body will be built up, out of many members. A noble inspiration indeed! But can we trust it? Where is the evidence? What is the proof? Can we verily use this high language, as we look out upon this actual earth at our feet? Does it, indeed, appear as if it were being carried forward towards this consummation? Look at it! How blindly it all works! how checked and thwarted it is! The good that is in it is so hesitating, so unstable, so uncertain. Where is the sign of the Coming? Where is the promise of its final glory? Look at it! How heavy, how slow, how sluggish, its motions! How dark it all seems, and how silent! We grope our way amid a terrifying silence: nothing comes to assure us that God is watching. The machine

grinds on in death-like silence. The heavens bend over us as we toil, in silence. The earth, amid which we wrestle and toil, is silent too. The great sea drowns us in its dark waters, and is speechless. The dust is laid on us; we go down into the darkness of the tomb, and all is soundless and silent,—ah, silent with a silence that may be felt! If God would but break this silence—but speak, touch, cry,—then there might be relief. This far purpose of His, in Christ, is too remote to kindle, too immense to enjoy, too intricate to follow, too hard to embrace, too severe to console us. We may strain our eyes in contemplation of it; but contemplation is cold and loveless. Oh that God would draw near—near, here and now; that face might meet Face, and heart meet Heart; that we might know the warmth of His love, and the Arms of His compassion!

Oh that we knew where we might find Him—find Him at our side; might look up into His Eyes, and hear His Voice in our ears—His sure and comforting Voice, with its steady direction to us, in every knot of perplexities, “This is the way, walk ye in it”! His work, His plan in Christ—how can we measure, or fathom, or define it? This Vast and Eternal Counsel—so shadowy, so distant, so vague, so far-reaching,—how can it advise, aid, direct, a poor wandering human soul, one tiny atom in this huge system, as it gropes its feeble way along uncertain paths? How can you and I flatter ourselves that our little place and office on the dim earth are of serious concern to God in this age-long achievement? No! we cannot sustain our belief at this high level. We cannot seriously assume our own importance and value in the unrolling of this everlasting mystery. We

cannot tell what we are wanted for, or of what use to Christ we can possibly be, or how it matters much what we do ; nor can we present this Divine purpose in any intelligible shape to our mind, in any vivid form to our imagination, so that it can really illuminate, with clear vision, this strange, sad, bitter turmoil of human life, as it tosses and roars about our feet.

Yes ! so we must have lamented ; how can we help it ? So we must all have sighed, and fainted, and despaired. And, once again, the great answer is given : “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.”

God has not only planned, He has also spoken. He has broken that silence in which He worked His great work. And the Sound which He lets loose—the Word which He utters, the Cry which He sends forth, lo ! it is His Son,—that same Son Who is Himself the Eternal Purpose in

Which, and for Which, all things were made. The Child, Who is the consummation towards which all this vast movement draws, is also the Hand reached out by the Father to touch us—the Arm by which He embraces us.

Ah! in Him, God comes near indeed! His very Face shines in upon us; His very Voice it is that speaks. "No man could see God at any time"—that was our sorrow; and now He, the Son, makes clear to us the revelation. He makes all clear. He is the Light. He, Who is the Purpose, is also the Interpretation of the Purpose.

Listen to Him. How deep He goes! How strangely simple life becomes in His sight—to His mind! How unbaffled He is; how undisturbed; how unperplexed! Here is One to Whom we can willingly commit ourselves—so true He is, so sure of Himself,

so masterful. We bring Him our riddles, and the puzzle disappears, the mystery dissolves, the knots all untie themselves. Far and wide, high and deep, His utterances reach. The confusion takes shape and order as He looks at it; the tumult, the babel, becomes intelligible as He reads its secret. He speaks always as "One that hath authority." He speaks as One "Who knows what is in man."

Nor is it only His word which shows light, which interpret. Much more is He, Himself, the Word. His whole Being speaks to us, carries a message, brings us good news of God. This Child is Himself the Revelation. See Him, and you see the Father. Know Him, love Him, and it is God Almighty Whom you know and love. Obey Him, and you are loved of God. Abide in Him, and lo! it is the Father Who enters in and sups with

you. Everything in Him is a word from God. Is it His tenderness that draws you to Him? it tells you—even so tender is your Father in Heaven. Is it His purity holds you enthralled? even so is your Father in Heaven pure and stainless and white. Is it His mercy subdues your stubborn heart? even so is your Father merciful. Watch Him, learn of Him, cling to Him, follow Him: and you will be a child of God the Father Almighty. Oh the blessed joy to have God so near, so clear, so intelligible, in a shape that the mind can so sweetly handle, and the heart so dearly love !

And more. He pledges Himself, pledges His life, to the truth of that Eternal Purpose of God, Which He is,—pledges Himself just at the point where our faith wavers and lapses. Just where that purpose seemed to

languish, to fail, to break,—just in the thick of that misery, suffering, pain, death, which confused and distressed our apprehension of God's truth,—just there He places Himself. He offers Himself to the worst defeat; He is stamped with the brand of our shame: nails, thorns, spear, contempt, hate, torture,—all these He takes, that He may certify to us, by His own Blood, that the purpose of God still holds good; that the love of God, in Him, is even yet working out its consummation in glory; that nothing is lost, wasted, forgotten, despised; that all is still directed and moved by a Compassion that cannot fail, by a Will that cannot break, towards an end that is worthy, towards a far and Divine rest that yet remaineth open to receive the people of God who, by faith, shall endure until they enter in.

Yes! He gives us this pledge of Himself,

that we may be of good heart when we think ourselves forsaken of God. Following in His steps, we cannot be wrong: we have hold of the secret; we do not fear that we have lost the path; that which once terrified, has lost its terror; that which seemed a curse, proves still a blessing. As is the Master, so may well be the servant. In Him Who suffers, we, too, can be brave to suffer. In Him Who dies, we, too, may dare to die.

“Glory to God in the Highest; good tidings,” indeed, “of great joy to man:” “Unto us this Child is born, unto us this Son is given.” “Glory to God.”

And yet a riddle remains—dark, menacing, cruel as any.

We had asked, “Is there any end to all this human labour? Is there any good fruit to be seen out of this wide sorrow?”

And the answer came : " A Son is prepared : *He* is to be its perfect issue, its glad fulfilment. The Christ is coming, Who is the sum and crown of all."

We had asked, " How can we know this? The silence frightens. Oh if God would but speak and reveal Himself!"

And the answer came again : " A Child is born ; a Son is given." He is the Pledge of the promise. He makes known the Will, there where it seemed darkest. He is the Oath of God, the Oath which He swears by Himself ; He can swear by no greater than that. God has " sworn once by His holiness, I will not fail David." And Christ is that Oath by which God binds Himself to bring His good purpose to pass,—by which He assures our trembling and sinking hearts.

But yet, now again, the weak whisper of

doubt is at work within the deeps of our souls. Is it enough to know? Is it enough to listen as this great oath is sworn? We may be assured that God is faithful. We may be convinced that this Christ has spoken. We may hear His Voice, as He passes over the boisterous waters, saying, "Fear not; it is I: be not afraid." But alas! we are too weak to be loyal to our own convictions. We are too broken to walk in the light of this assurance, "Be not afraid." But the storm is so heavy, and the Christ seems to sleep. The loud winds roar, and the waves hiss and foam. The ship creaks and groans; the planks are starting. How can we help being afraid? We have lost nerve; we cannot hold back the panic that shakes us. Now and again we may feel faith strong, and may start to walk to the Christ over the loud waters. But then it dies

out ; and we fail, we grow dizzy, we are sinking. We cry out in our fear. Unless the Christ will reach a hand to us we are lost.

Now, this new riddle is no disaster ; rather, it is the beginning of self-knowledge. It is because we have some light from Christ, that our impotence, our instability, our barrenness, disclose themselves.

The Light of Christ assists and emphasises this disclosure of our weakness in two chief ways.

(1) By supplying not only a high, but a definite standard. We may have high ideals before believing in Christ ; but, with most of us, they are far too vague to really put us to proof. They float indefinitely round about our best moments ; but they do not thrust themselves in to sharply test our ordinary acts, our everyday feelings. We do not know how sadly we slip

and stumble, until we are really in haste to make for a definite goal. Belief in Christ sets a hope before us, insistent, urgent, unceasing. It fixes us on a single object; it calls upon us to run a definite race; it demands speed and readiness. Now we discover too bitterly our lack of training, of discipline, of care, of zeal. Who could have guessed himself so profoundly unfit?

(2) Before belief, we attribute all our recognised failures to our want of belief. We feel ourselves lazy, weak, ineffectual; but, then, we think, "It is all because I do not know what to be at, what to hold. Oh if I believed! If I were sure that Christ had died for me, and called me to be His servant, how fervent I should be, how devoted! There is nothing I would not do!" So we think; and, so thinking, we pass our easy censure on professing Christians, who,

for all their claim to believe, do not seem better than ourselves—are not more free of failings. “Why do they not carry out their Master’s words? Why are they so timid and selfish and worldly? They ought to be as their Master, if they believed Him,—homeless as the birds, blameless and compassionate, consecrated to heroic service, afire with martyrdom.” Yes; we all are sure, before we believe, that, if we believed, we should be saints.

But when we do find belief at last, then begins the revelation. Certainly, we believe; and yet, and yet, how is it? We stumble so sadly; we slip back so meanly; our faults are more obvious than ever, more annoying, more disheartening. Anxieties, fears, shrinkings,—these swarm about us. How disappointing we are to ourselves; how aggravating; how blind; how untrue; how blundering; how passionate; how indolent;

how perverse ! The more pains we take, the more stupidly we fail. And now there is no doubt where the secret of it all is to be found. It is not the belief that fails us ; the failure is in ourselves. It is we who fail our belief. It is our will, that lags so desperately behind our wish. It is our flesh, that encumbers so heavily our spirit. It is our passions, that pull so mercilessly at our desire,—our passions, that clamber, and climb, and hold, and entangle, and oppress, and stifle, and choke us. It is the old man in us, so strong, so selfish, so hard, so deadly. It is sin, that is not cast out : its clutch is still about our throat ; its horrid breath still poisons ; and its filthy hands are not loosed. “ Oh, miserable man that I am ! Now I know myself. Now I see myself in God’s sight. Now I begin to abhor myself. Now I lie low, with my mouth in the dust. I cannot do what

I would. The light shines ; yet some horrible self in me drags me down into the darkness which it loves better because its deeds are evil. I see what I ought to be, and I can never be other than I am. I see what God calls me to do, and I can never fulfil it. ‘Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’”

So we cry. And back to us comes the old answer, so sweet, so strong, so cheering, so all-sufficing: “Unto you a Child is born, unto you a Son is given.”

“Unto you a Son is given,”—given, as the Only Begotten Son, that you who believe in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life,—given, as the Bread from Heaven, that you who are hungry and faint-hearted may eat thereof and not die.

“Unto you a Child is born,”—born, in the city of David, to save you from your sins,—born to

become yours, to become that in you which you cannot be of yourself,—born to reinvigorate and recreate.

“Born that you no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.”

He comes not only with light, but with power. Yes, power! Not only is He the Wisdom of God, in Which the world was made,—not only the Revelation of God, Who lighteth every man,—but also the Power of God, to arrest the flood of evil, to push back the merciless curse, to force open the bolted gates; the Power by which the strong Will of God enters into action upon the field of human history, and works mightily, thrusting Its victorious way against all the weight of hostile principalities and unkindly powers. With power He comes from Heaven, that you who receive Him may have power to become, in His adoption, sons of God.

This is the Child born to us—a Child Who is at once Wisdom, Light, Power. And what, then, is the message which the good news carries to you, as you turn from the old and face the new year? Surely one supreme message—the message of hope,—hope, amid a world that grows daily more sad with hopelessness,—hope, to those (alas! so many) who have forgotten the very sound of that sweet Name. We preach hope for an earth that, through much sad tribulation and anguish, is, nevertheless, assured of its final justification in Christ,—hope, for men who gaze in blindness, because on them at last the light has shone and is shining,—hope, for all sinners weary through sinning, who may receive into their sick souls the power of the new life. They may begin a life as yet utterly unknown; they may pass into a light hitherto untasted.

They may begin ; for to them a Child is born—
a Child, a new thing on the earth—a Child,
enduing them with its own freshness, health,
innocence ; a Child in Whom all is given back,
made wholly new ;—a Child, born once for all
on Christmas Day, and born again and again
in every heart that will open its door, and
receive Him, Who “maketh all things new.”

CHANGE

“All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.”—ECCLES. iii. 20.

“Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.”—ST. JOHN vi. 49, 50.

Change

“The star, which they saw in the east, went before them till it came and stood over where the young Child was,”—ST. MATT. ii. 9.

THE star of Epiphany is a star of hope—of hope for the science and wisdom of the world, that it may be aided to see its way to the Manger at Bethlehem, and, by force of its own curiosity, patience, and zeal, be found ready to lay at the feet of the infant King its treasures so bravely won, so dearly prized,—its gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And the character of this new hope, now born into the world, we have already considered, in its threefold character.

We "have spoken" of hope in view of that Divine consummation towards which the toiling creation slowly moves—moves to find its rest and its glory in the Son, Who has been given it; of hope, again, through the gift of Revelation, of Divine speech, spoken to us, out of the silence, in the Person of the Child born to us; —of hope, yet again, in the assurance of power lodged within us, to defeat wrong and to purge sin, through Him, the Child, the Son of God, Who houses Himself, not only in the stable of that royal inn at Bethlehem, but in the secret places of every penitent heart that will let Him enter in, through its door of faith, to lay His Head in any manger, however bare and poor, that may be offered Him.

This is our hope, whose star rises high in the East—in the East, whence comes the dawn, —hope in Him Who is called "the Word"

because He is, in Himself, the Wisdom and the Light and the Power of the Father Almighty.

But alas! this hope of ours, which drew to itself of old the wisdom of the East, is found, in these later days, rather to repel than to attract much of the science and wisdom of the West. And this it unhappily does under all its three heads. For under every head it introduces, directly and inevitably, just those elements which scientific habits tend to dislike and to reject. For it proffers a solution of life's riddles, which, gracious and winning as it may be, yet lands us at once upon those expressions that have become so ominous and so uncomfortable,—lands us upon what we call “the supernatural,” “the miraculous.”

Take, first, this Divine consummation in the Perfect Manhood of Christ Jesus. This, if it is to guide, control, manipulate our life on

earth, involves a steady and consistent introduction of the supernatural in among the daily affairs of nations and men. A supernatural event, the Birth and Resurrection of the Christ, is to insert its regulative dominion over human conduct. A supernatural issue, in a higher world, at the coming again of Him Who has gone out of our sight,—this is to be the star by which we here in the flesh propose to direct our straying steps.

Here, then, is at once a troubling element—nor are the problems raised under the other two heads less alarming. For, in both, the supernatural assumes its most distinct and dreaded shape, as the miraculous. Revelation, a unique, special, absolute speech of God emitted over and above the ordinary conditions of natural order,—this cannot appear among our common and daily experiences without a shock

of disturbance. And Redemption—an act, a force put out by God, to arrest an inevitable issue, to block and dam an incoming flood, to traverse the lines of natural evolution, to cut off an hereditary entail in the blood,—this, indeed, cannot be asserted without allowing that something abrupt, violent, cataclasmic, has wedged itself in amid the solid and even sequences of history; that the courses and currents of things have been, at a certain definite point in their story, round about a certain historical date, strongly checked, reversed, broken; and this is *miracle* in its deepest meaning—of which the limited and separate miraculous deeds are but the surface-signals.

Modern wisdom is largely baulked of its hope, of its star, by those obstacles that seem to its eye to becloud and encumber it. And very naturally; who can be surprised at it? We

surely need not suppose Science to be malicious, or vain, or scoffing, because it finds the miraculous uncomfortable and obstructive. Its normal habits, its necessary training, its very successes, are quite enough to account for its repugnance; for they all must find themselves unexpectedly at fault whenever they encounter a shock, a cataclasm, a change, a leap, a reversal, a novelty, an exception, a unique and incalculable movement. All these constitute scientific lapses and obstacles, and they do violence to its most successful methods.

This must be allowed, and we ought to allow it generously; and yet we may still plead quietly with Science, in its fit of natural impatience at discomfiture, asking it, first, the simple question, Do you think that your methods, based as they are on the conditions of physical, material nature, are necessarily universal? Are

they applicable to every part of man? Are they co-extensive with all his nature?

"Of course not," all genuine Science answers : "we never pretended they were. We are continually declaring ourselves agnostic—declaring ourselves ignorant of much that obviously must exist."

Yes ; we grant it : but we ask still, Do you see all the importance of this admission? For if your methods are such as you describe—if they omit whole sections of man's being, if they carefully confine themselves to certain regions of Nature and avoid others—nevertheless, you cannot but confess that man as he is, as he exists, is a Whole—that Nature is a Whole, organic and entire. Neither he nor it can be actually severed off into these separate divisions. Where are you going to draw your accurate partition between man's body and his

spirit, so that you may treat and handle his body just as if his spirit were not there at all? Obviously, no such division can in life be effected. Rather, every day Science is assuring itself of this wonderful and intimate correspondence between flesh and spirit with fuller and more delightful evidence. Every day it is becoming more difficult for Science to be sure when it has reached its proposed limits, or when it has crossed them.

Now, if so, what follows? Why, that in limiting your researches and methods to body, to material phenomena, you are making an abstraction that does not actually correspond to facts. It is very urgent for your success in research that you should make this abstraction, that you should observe this limitation. Without strictly observing it, you would, no doubt, be practically powerless. Herein

lies your success. But, nevertheless, an abstraction it remains—an artifice, or temporary expedient. You have separated off, in mind, certain sections which do not actually exist in that severed and isolated condition; for nothing in Nature is ever isolated. But then, if all your methods of knowledge are based absolutely on this isolation, on this temporary, mental separation of things that are naturally inseparable, what must be the result? Such methods, being partial, must terminate with a shock at some point or other, where they come across the matter which they have elaborately omitted. Nature, being absolutely one from end to end, cannot keep herself divided in half to suit scientific convenience; and, now and again, wherever and whenever the unity of Nature has reason forcibly to assert itself, your scientific methods and regulations, as they jog

along in the security of their successful abstraction, will become conscious of a jar, a jolt, of something abrupt, disagreeable, dissenting. That jar, that shock, is not an interference in Nature, a suspension of Nature; it only interferes with your abstraction from Nature, it interferes with your efforts to keep your own materials separate and isolated from the rest; it suspends the success of your limitation of yourself to that half of Nature to which you habitually confine your attention.

“But why, then,” Science may answer, “why am I habitually able to go on quietly, without this limitation mattering, without troubling myself about what I have left out? Why am I only pulled up violently at certain rare points, at which you choose to assert the direct and positive existence of the supernatural and of miracle? No; I rely on my habitual success, as

against your random miraculous moments. Why should this shock take place so abruptly at a certain date, when it bides so quiescent year after year? What motive, what reason, can you give? For I have an explanation of my own,"—so Science goes on to observe to us,—“an explanation supplied me by Spinoza, and used by me ever since. Miracle, I find, occurs only to religious believers. It is you religious people—with your ignorance of the unbroken uniformity of Nature, with your childish fervour at cross purposes with austere Law,—it is you who so lightly and freely declare that you have come across a shock of this miraculous kind. And you do so, because you have in you, still unexpelled, the old wonder of the savage, who loves all that is strange, odd, abnormal, excited, eccentric; who clings in his bewilderment to anything novel, unlooked for, sudden, awful.

It is the savage in you that enjoys the miraculous. Knowledge would abolish the inclination. The savage admires the surprises of Nature ; the cultivated man admires its fixity, its uniformity. Once realize in your mind the Divine splendour of the Eternal order, and the mind refuses to associate with its ideal of Divinity the petty disturbance of a miracle."

Now, here is a distinct and valid challenge—a challenge which takes the question from the philosopher and hands it over to us. For it is perfectly possible for any plain man or woman, who has any spiritual experiences, to state the inward motives to which miracle makes appeal. Let us ask, then, What is it in us, religious professors, which makes us more ready than the scientific mind is, to expect the sudden and special appearance of the supernatural? Is it the savage instinct of wonder at the un-

known? Is it the savage in us, which falls down in worship before the strange, the abnormal, the surprising?

This is our question ; only, before answering this, we must just touch on the first retort made by Science against us. It was this : "Why am I habitually able to ignore, without difficulty, this spiritual side of things, while confining myself to my own special field of Physical Nature? Why is it only at certain rare moments that I am pulled up short by its abrupt introduction on the scene in the shape of miracles?"

Our answer, I think, is clear. You have learned, by long habit, to make the necessary allowances in your calculation, for the habitual and normal action of spirit. But it is always possible to feel the shock, the jar, which shakes your methods of study whenever they knock up against this spiritual world. It makes itself felt, whenever

these methods approach their limits, as, *e.g.*, when they touch on original creation, or on real causes, or on points where the order of things makes any novel start on a new level, as when organic life appears on the top of inorganic matter, or, again, when man's free-will comes into view. At all these points, where spiritual creation makes itself specially obvious, your methods are habitually conscious of a jar : but, as long as the spiritual side keeps pretty closely to its usual forms, you have learned, by long practice, how to allow for all necessary friction,—how to omit it with safety from your calculation. Your scientific instinct warns you, with quick security, wherever there is an obstacle of the kind at hand, and you sheer off, and avoid collision. The problem is there always, at every step ; but it can lie dormant, because you, and all men, have a mutual under-

standing. Every one understands what you are handling, and what you are proposing to ignore. All goes well so long as the spiritual forces present in Nature and in man preserve their normal quantity and degree, behave according to their usual manner.

But suppose there is a crisis in that unreckoned spiritual world—suppose something occurs to disturb its normal proportion, to increase its quantity and bulk, to intensify its pressure—then this would throw you out, and your customary allowance for spiritual friction would be upset ; your smooth methods would at once be sensitive of an unforeseen shock ; the instinctive regulations, by which you provided against the introduction of this alien subject-matter, would break down ; there would be interference, jar, violence, miracle.

“ Yes ; but is it likely, then, that there should

be such a crisis in the spiritual world? that it should suffer any abrupt change? that it should at certain rare moments reverse, increase, intensify its activity? Is it not infinitely more probable that it, too, would possess that un-deviating fixity which impresses us with its magnificence in physical nature? Is it not still the savage in you which imagines any such alteration?"

Now we are back at the old crucial question. Is it the wonder of the savage that makes us suppose and believe this change—suppose and believe that there might be a crisis in the spiritual world, which would affect its normal relations to the material earth and to ourselves?

How we leap to make our indignant answer!

I appeal to all those who, with me, believe in Christ; I ask you, what is it which makes us

look to Him to change, to reverse, to break up the conditions of life in which we find ourselves? Is it childlike wonder? Is it blank savage amazement? Is it ignorant wilfulness? Is it mere waywardness? Ah, how far from our temper! What a strange outrage on our prayers, on our thanksgivings! They ask us why we look for a change—for a supernatural reversal? Because we are fast bound in misery and sin; because we are netted and snared in a horrible trap; because we have sunk down into the pit that we have made; because, taken in the mass, we are slaves of lust, dragged up and down a miserable earth at the beck of gross, fleshly powers — powers of darkness, cruelty, terror,—powers and principalities, which have bound their strong cords about us until our very struggles have died away into the impotence of despair.

Why do we look for a crisis—for a change ? Because we are sick, and blind, and halt, and maimed, and poor, and naked, and loathsome, and unclean ; because, do what we will, we still slip back into this clinging tyranny, or still, for all our efforts, find ourselves lower and lower in these dark waters, and know that, if things remain as they are, we must drown at last in some muddy death.

Why do we look for a crisis—for a change ? Because, blind and sick and filthy though we be, we yet have not lost all sense of a good God, Who made us in His own Image, long ago,—not yet lost all memory of a heavenly city, and of shining gates, where run the crystal waters down the golden streets,—a city where lies our only citizenship,—a city towards which our pilgrim souls send out their sighs of vain desire. Yes, we have a home

from which we came out. Oh how we yearn after its sweetness and its peace, here, amid the husks and the swine, in the loneliness of the grim wilderness, far, far from the light of the Father's eyes and the warmth of the home that we have lost, but not forgotten!

Why do we look for a change? Because, so remembering our own dear and imperishable home, we cannot bring ourselves to believe that God, the good Father, will forget or forsake us,—cannot for a moment believe that His anger will not be turned away; that His forgiveness will not strive, and strain, and work, to make some new way to reach us; that He will let anything check or bar that strong love of His,—will not put out some strange, some unlooked-for effort to win back his banished, to let loose these sad prisoners of sin. Yea, indeed, He will not, surely, keep silence; He will not

endure to see Jerusalem, His own city, a heap of stones; He will not suffer His children to go down into the silence of the pit. He will yet hear their cry. He will bare His right Arm. He will rend the heavens. As He looks, and sees no man to uphold, no arm to save or help, He will be heard coming Himself from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah. He will be here one day, glorious in His apparel, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save!

No, indeed it is not with idle curiosity, not in ignorant awe, that we look for some special, unique, overmastering crisis in the spiritual kingdom.

Not in idleness,—it is the most earnest, serious, practical necessity of our innermost moral life that demands, at all costs, some spiritual reversal of the present—some mighty shock of change.

Not the savage in us,—it is the stern and disciplined man, who has set himself, with all diligence and patience, to apprehend and serve the highest moral law of God,—it is he who knows fullest the ample extremity of his need, the abyss of his own impotence, the horror of his black bondage; it is he who sends up his whole soul in the bitter appeal, “O miserable man! Who, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Nay; not in impertinent curiosity, not in unsteady ignorance, do we look for a miracle. But in the sober, solemn passion of self-humiliation—in the intelligent and scientific appreciation, by long experience, by vigilant scrutiny, of our inner state, of our wretched sickness, of our pain, disorder, disease, corruption,—it is in this temper that we pronounce our condition hopeless and intolerable; that we are persuaded

to search high and low for the one Physician Who may heal ; that we are sure that this horrible fixity of earth and heaven will not imprison us for ever, that the stiff bars of iron necessity will yield, that a shock will shatter them, that a change will break in, that God will make a new day dawn, a new start possible.

Therefore it is that we look eagerly for signs of the change, for promises of revival, for shocks and cataclasms ; that we set watchmen on all high towers, to strain their eyes into the night, that they may see the first streak of the coming day, may catch the first cry that comes to us, saying, " Babylon is fallen, is fallen ! "

We do not, indeed, pretend to have disposed of all perplexities that surround the question of miracle. But one thing we do most certainly claim ; that, at least, the possibility of attributing our belief in miracle to savage wonder is

disposed of finally, and for ever, so far as we go. Anyhow, that is not the explanation. It is a loose and ignorant slander. No Christian miracle responds to ignorant curiosity. All our miracle is bound up with the deepest necessities of our spiritual faith in the goodness and mercy of God. The very motives by which we cling to Christ prepare us for some Divine action, which, if it is to save us, must be unique, abnormal, convulsive; for it can only be by some spiritual earthquake that our prison doors can be thrown open, and all our bonds fall off us.

And this spiritual earthquake, if it occurs for our deliverance here and now on earth, must of necessity reverberate over from us to the material nature; for the two are, in their living and real character, not two, but one—one organised and correlated whole; and our abstraction of the

one from the other is only an artifice, that must be always untrue to the complete fact.

And, now, what of ourselves? How does all this tell home?

At least we learn how close, how very close, all intellectual perplexities in matters of faith lie to our moral and spiritual experience. We wonder why God does this, or that; and the reasons-why are all the time within us—in our inward condition and wants. It is in view of us, of our moral situation, that He acts. To measure God's methods, we must weigh our own needs. To understand Him, we must understand ourselves. So here we find that this problem of miracle all turns on the one inquiry, What is our sin? How can we be released? What degree of violent and novel activity will the release involve?

If the intellectual problem vexes and per-

plexes us, let the inquiry into ourselves be pressed home with equal incision. Ask more diligently, "Do I know myself? Have I at all taken accurate measure of my spiritual sloth, my nakedness, my poverty of grace, my idle selfishness? Have I estimated what it would cost God to redeem me? Have I patiently examined the secret of my weakness, of my blindness, of my inertness? Have I discovered my bondage?"

Ah, that bondage!—you will never discover its misery, or its strength, until you have made a struggle to escape out of it. You cannot tell how cruelly its cords can cut, until you strain to break loose from them.

Have you never felt their merciless grip upon you? Do you feel pleased with yourself, comfortable, complacent? Then ask yourself whether you are at ease, only because you have

accepted that temper of the world which is indifferent to evil, have acquiesced in some sin, have hushed the secret up which used to wake and trouble you, have listened only to the kinder voice that whispered "peace" when there should be no peace. If this be your case, if you cannot discover that you yourself need any inward change, then you must not be surprised if you do not see any need, either, for God to work a miracle.

EPIPHANY

“One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh : but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.”—ECCLES. i. 4, 5.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery. . . . We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump : for the trumpet shall sound, . . . and we shall be changed.”—I COR. xv. 51, 52.

Epiphany

“Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.”—

ST. JOHN ii. 8.

“THE supernatural,” “the miraculous,”—this is certainly no accident of our faith—no mere appendage tacked on by ignorant enthusiasm to the sober, spiritual realities,—no decorative vesture in which an ardent belief has clothed and embodied its inward recognition of the Divine in Christ. We are perfectly sure of this. For Christian miracle never appeals to our ignorance, to our savage wonder, to our wayward curiosity. Against all such motives for miracle, the scathing judgment of our Lord Himself has gone out once and for

ever — “ An evil and adulterous generation, that seeketh after a sign ; there shall no sign be given it.” Our need for the miraculous, for a violent arrest of the natural bent of things, for a convulsive change in our fixed condition, lies, as we have seen by God’s help, in the deepest and most serious experiences of the spiritual man. It is our sickness that demands some unique and emphatic remedial action from God. It is our sin that cries aloud for some tremendous act of reversal, of release. The more rigid and profound our scrutiny of the inner man, the more rigorous becomes the necessity for God to work a marvel.

Yet, if so, why is the Science of the West still hesitating, still shrinking ? Why do its studies, for all their patient industry, issue in no star to crown their labours—a star standing over

the house where the young Child lies? Is it that still the Image of God which is presented by miracle is suspected to be lower and more childish than that which is offered through scientific study? "True," many people may be saying, "it may not be mere savagery, mere blind curiosity, mere wayward ignorance, that asserts the existence of wonder-working; it may be the inner moral man, who, in the extremity of this distress, cries out for some violent interference. This we will allow you. But is it not still a weakness—an infirmity? No doubt it is the Prophet who, in his high passion, calls to God to rend the heavens. But his passion may be asking the irrational, the impossible. This God, who is to reverse, change, uproot the order of things, would be unworthy of that great God Whom we learn to admire and adore in physical nature. There

we find another and more magnificent image given us of the Divine eternity—an eternity of fixed and changeless law, of undeviating and austere regularity. There everything is strict, unalterable, uniform, persistent. No quiver of change dims the great vision as it moves along its timeless way ; no shock of uncertainty shakes, for a moment, those unwavering lines, or ever disturbs the rhythm of those calculated courses. There, surely, is the Shadow of God Himself—the High, and the Holy, Impassible and Motionless ; fixed in His everlasting seat.

“ But you who profess to be more religious flout this ideal. Your picture of God is less noble than ours. You throw this vision over, you break it up ; you drag us down on to a lower level as you force us to think of these variations, breaches, novelties, interruptions. Even if God has condescended to your weak-

ness by abnormal and exceptional mercies of this kind, how of the Divine Ideal? Is it not obscured by this introduction within it of an element of changeableness, of unsteadiness? How can you build up a lofty conception of God by rooting attention on strange exceptions, by finding such special significance, not in order, but in disorder—not in regularity, but in cataclasm? Science, that fixes its eyes on the changeless uniformity of God, is more true to God than Belief, which lowers the Almighty to a Being of shifts, and experiments, and failures, and diversities, and abrupt struggles, and rash adventures, and sudden recoveries. These broken lights, these varying glimpses of God, won through peeping and prying, won through odd loopholes, and rare accidents, and fitful revelations—how can they bring fuller news, convey a richer message, of

what God is, than can the steady and obedient sequence of unalterable order?"

Now, here is a vital point. Forgive me if I think it worth while to ask you to consider it, even at the risk of wearying you with profitless wrangling. It may not appear important to those of us who believe; but, nevertheless, it certainly is important for believers to discover whether their form of belief does really put a slur upon the Name and Glory of God—does really impute to Him unworthy and inadequate actions, from which thoughtful and earnest men have the right to recoil.

Are we, then, really working upon an ideal of God which, by attributing to Him variation, miracle, degrades Him to action inconsistent with the higher ideal of His changeless fixity? How shall we discover—how decide?

Let us take it in this way: let us test our ideals according to the scale of existence. Whence do we mainly derive the ideal of fixity, uniformity, regularity? Where is its chief sphere?

We derive it from the world of space—from the motions of solid bodies in space. The magnificence of the stars in their courses—their splendour, their vastness, their speed, the delicacy and certainty of immense astronomical movements,—these transfigure us with awe and admiration. And this amazement is intensified as a swarm of kindred sciences disclose to us that the very principles which guide the stars in their motions do also dispose every atom of our earth into its allotted place. Here, indeed, is a wonderful world laid open; and in this world, no doubt, there reigns absolute regularity, certainty, uniformity. Here every-

thing is calculable, ponderable, measurable. Here laws of rigid mathematical accuracy hold permanently good ; down to inconceivable minuteness, up to unknown heights and inexhaustible depths, the same unbroken necessities abide and never fail. The law of weight governs with invariable exactness. Whether it be the enormous globe of the sun, round which the worlds go spinning, or whether it be a speck of dust that shakes and dances in some minute and momentary ray, still the force, that makes motion, persists throughout, transmitted, but unchanged ; its bulk, its sum, neither rises nor falls ; or, at least, the possible loss is practically discounted. Change, variation,—these are but accidents on the surface. Science lies in the absolute reduction of all such incidents to the uniform, persistent, unwavering force which abides while these pass.

A magnificent world to explore and to explain, this! and out of it we can build an ideal of the Glory and Sublimity of its Eternal Maker. Yes; but now let us go a step further. Suppose that, at some obscure corner of that vast world of space, there came into view one tiny spot of animated matter—one little germ of protoplasm—quivering there, a fairy-cell, delicate as lace, hardly visible to the finest microscope; then all the moving stars fall back behind this new sight. It is ahead of them all. A new, a higher level, has been reached. A new possibility has been disclosed, a new path opened, a new kingdom begun; and the very least fragment of the lower layer of that kingdom of life stands higher than the very highest of that kingdom of inorganic matter. We have stepped up.

And now, observe, in stepping up, we begin to leave behind a little of that mathematical

symmetry of the lower layer. This new life, as it pushes forward, as it opens out, is not dominated by that old monotony. Instead of that unbroken persistence of force, we have a new law, the law of increase, growth, multiplication, advance. The force does not remain of the same quantity and bulk : it grows. It puts out strange and incalculable developments ; calculable, no doubt, by some inner law of its own, but not submitting to those arithmetical calculations which were supreme before.

This wonder of animate growth—think what it carries with it ! It offers us a scene, not of uniformity, but variation ; not of regularity, but experiment ; not of fixity, but change ; not of monotony, but diversity, novelty. It feels its way forward ; it gains new experiences ; it tries this, it tries that : now it pauses ; now it advances with a rush ; now it gets tangled in some

backwater ; now it adopts sudden methods which it afterwards drops : by hook, or by crook, it struggles to establish, and invigorate, and extend novel types of plant, or fish, or bird, or insect. It draws, apparently, on some fund of invention which is only restrained by the austere necessities of survival.

Now here, surely, is an entirely altered ideal presented to us ; an ideal of which uniformity is no longer the ruling thought ; an ideal which is full of elasticity, permitting a wide world of variation and change—permitting of experiment, of advance, of development. A new ideal springs up, and we have the right to call this ideal higher than our earlier one. It is drawn from higher springs ; it is charged with richer resources ; it carries us further. Living growth conveys a fuller message from God than the dead mechanism of matter and force. Yes ;

we are moving up, we are a stage nearer what God means ; we know more of what He is. We peep into a deeper secret of the Divine Will. That old world of solid bodies was magnificent, but its magnificence was only mechanical. God is a living God, and any form of life is a truer symbol of Him, a more significant reflection, a richer suggestion of Him, than anything inorganic and inanimate can possibly be.

The ideal is higher ; but, nevertheless, it has not, for its characteristic note, uniformity, but variation ; not fixity, but change.

Nor is that all. There is a fresh wonder ready to appear—a wonder of wonders. Right in the heart of this amazing fertility of growth, lo ! a new thing—a strange thing—a miracle, indeed ; a mind, a will, a conscience, lodged within the very core of animate life,

growing parallel with its growth. But not only growing as it grew, by blind push and thrust against encumbering pressure. No ; it has an utterly new way of its own, of which those old instincts are mere symbols, pictures, metaphors. It grows by thinking, by desiring, by willing. It does more than grow ; it, in its measure, creates. It creates that which was not there before. It does not merely push old methods further ; it invents novel methods altogether, by which to make wholly new advances. It invents ; and, again, it improves its own invention ; it corrects ; it reinvents ; it invents upon invention. So it builds up things without precedent, without example, without parallel—language, books, cities, poems, music, architecture, states, empires. Nor are its successes the only measure of its activity. It covers the earth with the *débris*

of a thousand impossible schemes, disastrous failures, indomitable adventures, hazardous experiments, ruinous collapses. And still the dauntless brain pours out unwearied schemes, and the will still sets itself to win, and the heart still beats with an unquenchable hope that even yet it will baffle rebuff, and uproot obstacles, and attain some glory yet undreamed of.

Now, what of our ideal—an ideal that will embrace not only growth, but invention,—not only the abundance of animal nature, but also the bewildering scene of human history? We are not attempting to define what that ideal shall be; only, this we can most positively assert—that less than ever will its dominant note be uniformity, or the perfection of mathematical order, or the rigid monotony of mechanical law. Law there is, no doubt; but not

mechanical law. Law there is, of course. Nothing can ever occur except by law—but by what law? Certainly it is a law that permits of most strange irregularities, of most surprising variations. It is a law which does not forbid advances entirely novel ; collapses, recoveries ; degradations, and regenerations ; sudden fits of electrical activity, dull lengths of sodden, and aimless, and unaccountable pause. It is a law under which regularity is at its lowest ; change is at its height. Yet we are as sure as we can be of anything that the ideal that covers this incessant agitation is higher than that old ideal based on the laws of mechanical transmission of force.

Here, in man, in human nature, we can rely on finding our best and fullest symbol of God. That is anthropomorphic, you say. Yes, exactly ; that is why it is right. We are intended

to make man the interpretation of God. For if man is the crown of God's earthly creation, then the study of man is the best road we can take to arrive at the deeper counsels of God. And God's Word emphasises this by assuring us that, in a peculiar and special sense, man is made in the Image of God. Therefore we are anthropomorphic: that is our strong point. Do not let us be afraid of it. We can gather better notions of God out of man's growth and development, than we can out of the motion of sticks and stones. Not that God admits of growth or development; but that growth and development offer fuller suggestions of His Mind and Nature than can be seen in the lower laws of gravitation, or of the persistence of force. It must be so, if we think of it. A man's living and personal soul must give us fuller news of God than can ever come from

Saturn's moons. History must be more interpretative of the Divine Will than geology or physics. Yes ; we are, in this sense, rightly anthropomorphic.

Now let us recall what we have reached. That ideal of God is the highest which is drawn from the highest layer of created life. But the higher we go in life, the more flexible and varied it becomes. Therefore, that ideal of God which admits of variation, diversity, and novelty is higher, and not lower, than one which bases itself on unbroken regularity, on fixity, on uniformity. Science was mistaken in imagining change to be a degradation of God. Nay ! change, motion, advance, novelty, —these belong to God's highest methods of action here on earth.

Miracle, then, so far as it involves change, variation, is not inconsistent with the Divine

ideal ; and, once satisfied of this, if then we turn our eyes down upon this human scene, how appropriate, how natural, does a Divine act of change, of advance, appear ! This human life is all ready and prepared for it to enter. It is not fixed, rigid, bolted and blocked against all fresh endeavour. Rather, it is itself subject to every variety of shock and motion. It has admitted, already, into its story every form of fluctuation, convulsion, catastrophe, lapse, effort, start, novelty, invention, correction, reaction, transformation, surprise. And what if God Himself, on His side, made a movement to meet its movements—put out an effort, special and unique, to respond to its broken and fragmentary efforts ? Would such a world as this repel or repudiate such Divine motions ? It is for ever correcting itself : why should it repel a correction of

God's ? It suffers catastrophes itself, it stumbles, it falls : why should it not admit of remedy as well as lapse—of recovery as well as slip—of regeneration as well as degradation ? It admits of irrevocable blunder, and why not of a fresh and Divine start ?

Surely, it is a world that invites miracle : it is a world which is receptive of suddenness and change ; it is not finished and rounded off, a thing of stiff, unyielding outlines ; it has windows thrown open to the voice of God's cries, and doors wide and free through which His Feet may enter. That lower layer might seem, in its monotonous repetitions, to give but rare and narrow possibilities of entrance to the novel and the strange : but the higher layer is growing, pliable, elastic, flexible, alive ; it can adapt itself to new conditions ; it can fold itself, with liquid ease, round about a new event ; it can assimilate

a fresh gift. It is a world of surprises ; how can it protest against one more surprise ? If there were serious reasons for some Divine convulsion to deliver and redeem it, it is already familiar with convulsions and reversals ; it is not repugnant to them ; it need not recoil ;—not recoil, because Divine activity answers to its own ; because there mingles with its own mixed voices, a Voice from Heaven ; because its new necessities invoke new revivals ; because its advance in sin provokes an advance of the power of Heaven. Itself alive with marvels, how can it refuse if God, too, works a marvel in its midst,—if to it a Child is born of a Virgin's womb,—if to it a Son is given, Who shall be the Firstborn from the dead ?

Miracle occurs to a world prepared for miracle ; open to miracle ; a world that, by its movements, invites miraculous entrance. Does it

not occur to us? Does no miracle reach us? Then this forces on us a practical question—Are you and I prepared? Are our souls open to it? Is our inner life such as to evoke some special act from God? Have we made motions, starts, struggles, to which it will be no surprise if God responds by efforts, starts, motions, of His own? It is we who must be in movement if a movement of God is to advance to meet us. It is our belief that must be stirring, if Christ is to do any mighty work in our midst. Motion will answer to motion—God's motion without to our motion within. If we do but step out, if we will but make the venture, then the new strange world opens, the new strange miraculous life begins. Where we end, God begins. Just where our effort dies away in feebleness, God lays hold of it, and saves it. Just where we stumble, and reel, God's Hand

is reached out to catch us. Just where we grow dizzy, Christ's Voice reassures: "I am here; be not afraid." Just where we swoon into pain and death, He is there, by our side, "Who died, and was buried; and behold, He is alive for evermore." This is the everlasting life of inward miracle, which each one of us may know, and taste, and learn, and feel, that so we may accept, with ease and joy, that record of outward miracle asserted in the Gospels, which is thus confirmed by our own experiences.

So living, in constant and personal contact with miracle, we hold the key, we understand, we see a reason for the Birth and Resurrection of Christ. The wonderful work all falls into its place; it assumes the quiet, unanxious certainty of the natural. It will become natural—just as natural, and simple, and plain as it was to the man at the pool of Bethesda, who rose, and

walked, and carried his bed without any wonder at all; without even taking the trouble to ask Who it was Who spoke with such power.

Oh the blessed release from all baffling scruples, questions, reasonings, debates, if once we found ourselves so walking in the light of that Supernatural Sun,—if once the strange spiritual life had touched us, had mixed in with ours, had become our very nature, our natural self, our daily bread, our staff, our breath, our blood, our bone,—if all the old swarm of weary disputes had vanished for ever in the overwhelming certainty—"This one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see"! Such a transition, effected so smoothly, would justify itself, would explain itself. Those who need some such change, those who wait for some Epiphany to strike through their poor and imperfect humanity, even as the wine that flushed the

expectant water at Cana,—they will feel as if their natural self could not possibly complete itself in any other fashion than in this supernatural transfiguration. So transformed, it does not lose, it finds itself; it discovers its real significance; it discloses its proper secret; it makes itself intelligible. Before, its life had seemed thin, empty, unfulfilled; now, its inner glory is made manifest. In this supernatural enrichment it receives its true worth, it attains its full value; it is made fit for its perfect use. “Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.”

GRACE

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”—ECCLES. i. 2.

“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”—ROM. viii. 20, 21.

Grace

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”—ROM. viii. 19.

HUMAN life is astir with movement, with marvel, with surprise; and we have been arguing that this animated and varied scene seems to offer an entrance, free, elastic, flexible, to such miraculous action as God may see good moral cause to take.

But, at this point, we are met, not so much by the great leaders of Physical Science, with their appeal to the rigid and majestic uniformities, which, to their minds, block out all exceptional variation—but, rather, by the Scientific Historians.

Theirs is a fascinating study, fresh with novel interest. They admit, with frank delight, all the pliability, the motion, the growth, the evolution, of man's tragic story. To them, as to us, human nature is engaged in incessant advance. They trace it forward out of its hidden germs in savage custom and practice; they unravel those back secrets under which its inventive impulses did their strange work long ago. They reconstruct its efforts, that lay forgotten in the buried years—efforts dead and done with, yet by which it won its way to the levels where the light breaks, and record and history begin. They mark the points at which flashes of insight came; the points at which a corner was turned, the points which notify a new departure, the points at which all human history undergoes transformation—the use of fire, the creation of an alphabet, the practice of

writing, the formation of a literature, the invention of printing, of the compass, of steam. Such momentous successes are given their full value. And each success increases the possibilities of movement: each change opens the way to changes yet more brilliant and surprising: it secures a vantage-ground for yet freer motions, for yet bolder manœuvres.

This is history, as every one now writes and reads it. It no longer supposes men to have been alike in all ages, and to have perpetrated a succession of dismal blunders before they managed to hit out the system of government and fashion of society, in which we ourselves are living. On the contrary, it emphatically asserts the actual change that has been going on in man himself. Human nature has changed, varied, developed. And all the process behind it is essential and justifiable; for it is the process by which it

climbed, by which it was itself altered, transfigured. Its history is the record of its successive changes : its present condition is the issue of those changes. They all have gone to make it what it is. And what it has been, it still will be. It is always undergoing change. It is to-day growing, developing, attaining. Many more steps remain to be taken. No one can define or limit the possibilities yet ahead, as slowly it sums up its resources, so hardly gained, and, in their strength, nerves itself for new efforts. Evolution, change, these are its very life. It dies if it ceases to change.

This is history, as we all now understand it ; but, then, it holds back just where we would tempt it to go a degree further. Change on the human side—that it will allow us. But why should this suggest or sanction a change worked from God's side? We have pleaded

that all this human movement, this human self-correction, offers a free unobstructed occasion for God, if He see fit, to respond to it with a movement of His own—to meet its efforts at self-correction with a remedial act of His own. The movement upwards offers points of attachment by which a movement downwards out of Heaven may intervene, may intermingle. God may stoop in response to man who mounts.

So we argue ; but Scientific History protests, recoils, disagrees. This is just the argument it most dislikes ; for it introduces on to the scene a new and disturbing factor. The variations, the surprises, the motions, which it agrees with us in recognizing—these all “evolve themselves,” so to speak : mysterious and strange they may be, yet still they all belong to human nature, to its growth, to its forward impulse.

They proceed out of it ; they are to be accounted for out of the secret forces lodged within it. This remains true whether we know, or know not, what those forces may be. They are there ; and out of them emerges this wonderful process of changing life. History counts on those present forces being sufficient to explain all that happens. "Why," it asks, "go beyond this ? Here is a rational and intelligible position. But you religious people cannot be satisfied with this. You will not take the thing as it stands, as it shows itself to you. You will insist on making it all an argument for something else—on supposing that all this wonder of human life is but opening a door to a Divine wonder. Thus you come, thrusting your supernatural, your miraculous world into the thick of our affairs : this is what confuses, troubles, disconcerts."

Now, why do we do this ? Why do we not

abide content with observing human changes? Why do we go on to assert a miraculous response to them?

It is, we claim, because this human growth, of itself, forces us to do so. It will not suffer us to arrest our attention with its own peculiar wonders. It seems to us, that its entire story is set from the very first, in all its varied movements, towards a Divine consummation. It, itself, is prophetic; the Prophets read its secret aright, as they declared that into its midst a Child should be born, a Son be given, Who should not merely be an earthly Messias, a perfect man, carrying to its full height the stature of the race, putting up before God the best and loveliest human service that can be done between the cradle and the grave. No, not this only; but a Son, a Child, Who, Himself in one sense a product of the race, born of a

woman, born under its law, nevertheless should carry up the sum of human life on to a new level ; should open a new scene ; should mount into a new region ; should make possible for the body of man a life beyond the flesh, beyond the grave ; should lift the entire movement by a change, a leap, as radical, as decisive as that by which inorganic matter had found itself used and transfigured to become the vessel of organic life, or as that by which the animal life had found itself used and transfigured to become the seat and instrument of the human spirit. So, by some step, not less momentous, not less radical, the human spirit, in its bodily vessel, was to find itself, through this Child, used and transfigured to become the organ and seat, the tool, and house, and temple of a Divine and Eternal Life that would, by lodging itself within its flesh, not destroy, but quicken it,—not kill it,

but enlarge, expand, transfuse it, so that it could be transferred into a higher kingdom, wherein all things are made wholly new : a kingdom of grace, a kingdom of heaven, a kingdom that passeth not away.

This is the consummation towards which everything points ; the Prophets, who so interpret our human story, are the only satisfactory historians : and if so, all human history is a preparation, from the first, for this final miracle, for this Divine close. And, if such a Divine intention shaped the original Creation, then it is perfectly natural that—when the movement of human history went wrong—when, through its sin, its upward direction was diverted and disturbed, its preparatory activities were corrupted, and choked, and disgraced—God should be bound by His own honour, by the glory of His good Name, by His infinite loyalty to His Son,

to move down, to break in, to intervene in a form that would violently drag back into position this distracted motion; would put out His strength to correct, to righten, to redeem; would straighten anew the bent stick, would purge the defiled fountain, would stop the wounds by which the life was bleeding itself away. For it is His own creation, His own hope, which is being wrecked by man's sin. He is implicated in its welfare. It is designed to attain its final glory in Him. It is natural, it is inevitable, that a God of compassion, a God of honour, should enter Himself into the fray; should be found Himself riding to the succour of a cause which is His own cause, and which yet, without His intervention, is doomed—is hopeless—is lost.

“But all this makes the case worse,” retorts Historical Science. “You are bringing in more of your supernatural than ever. Not only do

you insist on God interfering to heal and help ; but you must have also a Divine consummation in some world hereafter. You force our eyes away from the business in front of our feet—a business anxious, burdensome, complicated enough, God knows!—and call on us to look far away to some other world, to some supernatural kingdom, or to some mysterious, unintelligible end. This is what plain, sensible, rational men repudiate. They see an intelligible task in front of them—the expansion, the improvement of human life. Here lie obvious duties that everybody can understand. Here reason can do its work, scheming, foreseeing, correcting, directing, adapting. Here it has an end, distinct and definite,—the harmonious combination of all human skill into perfect and fruitful working. Why break into this clear matter-of-fact reality with

your dim, visionary, miraculous hopes, your impossible supernatural consummation?"

Now we, Christians, challenge every syllable of that retort. In our ears, it is a mere tissue of idle words. Who has the right to talk of an intelligible task, of obvious duties, of ends plain, distinct, and sensible,—they or we? An intelligible task! What is intelligible in human life, if once it be supposed to have no good beyond itself? What end is visible or definite, if that end be sought within human nature itself? They say that *our* end is distant and hazy. But what of this end they propose? A condition of happy social well-being. Is that, then, so close at hand? Where is it, here and now? What message or help can it bring to them who find no such conditions? What of the life at our feet—of the men and women of to-day—the men and women who

are to die centuries before this end thus promised can conceivably be reached? For, consider, each is an individual. He holds his end in himself. He cannot, by his very nature, be used as a mere means to another's end. Each is a person; that is, he has worth in himself, he must claim his portion, his fulfilment *within* the end. He must have something that justifies itself to him as he stands. This is no selfish claim. It is the first necessity of his being; it belongs to the laws of his existence. He could not be a personality and not claim this.

We are told that he is to be justified by serving an end which his posterity will enjoy. Ah, but that is just the question. How does he know that his children's children will enjoy it? Can he tell at all whether that which he sets himself to bring about will be their

happiness or their misery? How is he to know that the end for which he dies will not find men as sickly, soured, perplexed, disappointed, as they are to-day? By what test can he be sure that he is serving the right end? Does it look so certain that all men who are in earnest are sure to be furthering a final social happiness? Are there not thousands of men who serve, and slave, and perish simply to emphasize a good man's blunder, to enforce a warning, to signalize a lapse of judgment?

Abraham, indeed, and the fathers died, not having the promise. But at least Abraham saw the promise; he knew Whom he served; the end for which he died was worthy, was sure to come to pass, was glorious, was right. "He saw it, and was glad." Where is the secular prophet, who can pledge us his word that the end, which we are to die without

seeing, will be very good? Look round at the men who are so to die—to die in millions, not having the promise, but having, rather, blindness, ignorance, corruption, misery, famine, plagues, pain. There they lie, massacred in heaps. Where is the Jeremiah who can stand before Rachel as she weeps with the voice of lamentation over her dead children, slain in this Ramah—Rachel the mother of Israel, who refuseth to be comforted, because her children are not? Who is there will bid her to-day “refrain her voice from weeping and her eyes from tears, because there is hope in the end, saith the Lord, that they will yet come again to their own borders”? Who is there can say with Isaiah, “Behold thy Salvation cometh, and His reward is with Him, and His work before Him”? Can the wisest Evolutionist be trusted to assure us that all which we see about us is

worth while,—that all is moving towards an ultimate temporal peace, which will certainly be attained, though not by us, yet by those who come after us? Have they recognized the immense demand which prophetic promises make upon the faith of the hearers? If we are to build our lives on prophecy, can we omit the Divine factor, eternal, and almighty, on which the comforting assurance rests?

An intelligible task, a plain and obvious end to aim at!—is that really given us by those who bid us confine our interest within the limits of this earthly life,—arrest our attention and our hopes at the solid and positive body of fact that lies in front of our feet? They speak as if it formed an harmonious and ordered whole, which we throw into confusion by insisting on this forcible introduction of a strange element, the supernatural. But

where is this harmony which we disturb? Where is this wholeness which we break into? Does human life, as it stands, look like an integral and harmonious whole? Is that its present aspect? Does it explain itself? Does it account for itself? Is it in proper command of itself? Are its aims, its issue, its intention, its result so clear that we can arrive at positive directions and duties by simple consideration of it? Is there, indeed, any intelligible account at all of it to be given, on which any two men can be positively agreed, if we examine it by itself,—if we take it as constituting its own end?

They say they “need no ulterior consummation. Humanity is the proper fruit and crown of creation. You need go no further.”

We ask, Does humanity strike you as an adequate goal for the universe to have reached? Has it, indeed, any of the signs and notes

of a culmination? Is this the crowning, the triumphant achievement — this blind, mixed, wayward, struggling, perverse, pitiful, burdened race of ignorant, suffering men?

Look at actual mankind, as it toils and strains! Would not any spectator inevitably pronounce, "Here is no end, no goal touched, no rounded fruit. Such human life as this can be but a step, a process, a stage. The discords have not yet resolved themselves into a perfect chord. Nothing is reached. There must be another step to be made; there is something yet to come, to be manifested. As that lower animal world fought, and devoured, and perished, waiting for its fruit in man: so man fights on, devours, suffers, perishes, waiting for yet higher fruit—waiting for some adoption, redemption, consummation."

Look at humanity! Its ends are all ragged,

its threads hang out loose ; it is a fragment torn out of its setting, who can doubt it ? Its meaning is not yet decided, not yet disclosed. Its pattern is incomplete ; its lines break off short. Its rim is jagged ; its borders are still indefinite, shifting, unintelligible. Its days are incomplete ; its efforts are but suggestions ; its wisdom, but prophetic gleams of a truth suspected, a truth behind a veil. It travaileth, and groaneth, yet in pain. Surely some new light will break, some new level be taken ! Step by step we have come up the ladder of life ; but no sensible, no rational man can arrest himself here—can stop at this point, and say, “Lo ! I have come to the close ; this satisfies my intelligence ; this crowns all. I need go no further ; I hold the key.” Surely, so to stop is to invite madness. Surely, we Christians are obeying every instinct of reason, every neces-

sity of thought, if we assert that to have come so far only to reach this, is to arrive at a blind and intelligible disaster,—if we assert that faith is justified, by every fragment of experience, in announcing to us yet another step ahead, yet another level to be disclosed, yet another mystery to be unsealed, yet another kingdom to appear, yet another consummation to be reached—the God-man, the Perfect Fruit and Flower, in Whom alone God can see of the travail of His Soul, and be satisfied.

We, of the Christian faith, have at least this gain—that human life is for us a rational and an intelligible scene. For it is intelligible on one supposition only—that we are gazing at an educational process, a stage of trial and discipline, by which the entire human race is slowly matured, corrected, purged, prepared, to become the material of a new dispensation, the body of

a higher glory, the fulness, in its purified transfiguration, of Another, Who filleth all in all.

And, moreover, such an end, which rationalizes the whole story of this lower age, has this peculiar value—that it can offer itself, can justify itself to each individual soul of that wide humanity. For each one of us separately, in his place, that same end which is the goal of the whole body of mankind stands good. For each one of us, as for it, life is but a stage, a test, a putting to proof, not that we may touch, here, our perfection, but that we may learn how to receive our consummation in another and a better kingdom, in Christ.

Can we, in any other way at all, explain our own private life—interpret our own experiences? What is the one relentless lesson that we learn with every advancing year? Is it not that here on earth we shall never do more

than exercise but a tiny fragment of the capacities lodged in us ?

Have we intellectual interests ? Then every new year cuts down our chance of satisfying them. Fields of knowledge open out on all sides, fascinating, brilliant, delicious. Oh that we might but range through them all ! If only there were time ! If only we had the leisure ! Alas ! the swift hours grind us down ; ill-health, fatigue, trouble, these ruthlessly intervene. Oh the books that must lie unread, the languages unknown, the discoveries unheard of, the literatures untouched ! All must go, except some ridiculous trifle of fragmentary knowledge, which we can find time to scrape together in some dim corner of God's wonderful world. Our best knowledge is but a fragment of that which we have it in us to know.

Is it benevolence—the passion to aid our fellows? What a pitiful and narrow result we come to! Labour and toil as we may, we learn that we do well if we can here and there touch but the fringe of this perplexity of sorrow—do well if we do not stumble fatally against some blind and stupid obstacle, before we have even begun.

And joy—what funds of joy lie shut up in the souls of careworn men!—springs of brimming joy, which ought to have vent, which could leap up, and dance, if only the pressure and burden would lift, if only there were opportunity given, if only anxiety would not choke them, and depression defile. All of us have that in us which could leap and sing—that child-heart which, now and again, on some rare happy holiday, laughs in us with a child's freshness, bubbles with a child's delight. Yet so rare, so

pathetically rare, comes to it this sweet release! Back it must creep, our poor little heart of joy, and lie down, locked up, and hidden, and unused.

What of love? Love! Ah, how we could love! If we were but free, but pure, but unsoured by sin, how our love could expand, and grow! How it strains, and beats its wings within us, stifled, cabined, fettered, darkened, clipped! So little room we can afford it; so seldom can we give it its rich liberty. The best love which earth can bring us seems but a hint, a shadow, an echo of what our love might be, if all were right, if all were good. And this is the best! and what of the sadder many,—of those who feel its throb, and taste its passion, and are filled with its cry, and yet find no vent, no kindred heart, no receptive tenderness,—nay, find only blank, hard, naked walls of repellant and pitiless neglect?

Such worlds of joy and love, all possible to us, yet all untravelled! How could we endure it, if it were not that here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come? We are but pilgrims; that is why we are not soured, or in despair. These capacities—now but suggested, but started—we shall use them hereafter. It is all safe; nothing shall be wasted. Not here their consummation, their fulness. Here only their first opening, their first tentative struggles. One thing only is it essential to attain here on earth—not the use of our gifts, but the power to use them well hereafter; the moral will, which can put them to right use; the steady hand, the balanced skill, the formed character, the trained self-surrender. It is this which we are here, in this stage, to win. It is this which here, on earth, is primarily tested, purified, prepared. Win this first; set your-

selves to win this at all costs—now, while it is called to-day,—and leave the rest to God. Here the actual fulfilment is bound to be partial, accidental, fragmentary. Here, we are but fragments, with rugged ends, incomplete, experimental. But there is this one good end present to us all ; and it is possible, attainable, --under whatever conditions, in whatever lack of happiness, under whatever misfortunes, deprivations, ignorance. For, under any circumstances whatever, we can still learn patience, self-dedication, goodness ; still can practise love, and train hope, and increase faith ; still can learn to say, “Father, Thou hast my heart : teach me to devote my will to Thee ; and so prepare me for hereafter.” Every soul can do this ; and, so doing, every soul attains in fulness the end for which it was made—so doing, every soul can lie down in peace, when death shuts

its eyes to slumber, saying, "Thank God, I have known what earth was made for. I have found what life could do for me. I have not failed, or lost. I hold life's fruit; death cannot rob me of it. I go before God with my offering in my hand, the offering of a will, disciplined in Christ; and, so going, I can wait in peace. My capacities, my treasures, are all in His keeping, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt."

IMMORTALITY

“The dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.”—ECCLES. ix. 5, 6.

“Fear not; I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—REV. i. 17, 18.

Immortality

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”—REV. xxi. 1.

HUMAN life is, for Christians, but a fragment—a piece of some larger whole. As, beneath, on its lower edges, it passes down, by intimate attachments, into the layers of subordinate existence—animal, vegetable, chemical, mechanical,—so, atop, on its higher edges, it feels upward after some novel and strange kingdom, which, from above, shall descend to meet it, and shall take up its work, and lift it on to a new level, and give it its interpretation, and correct its imperfections, and justify its struggles, and purge its corruptions, and illuminate its hopes. It looks for this; it

demands it. It refuses to let us bide on its own ground ; it forces us to go beyond its border : it clamours for the supernatural. It pronounces itself, at every turn, to be but a beginning, but a suggestion. It starts so much ; it achieves so little. Its promise is so rich ; its fruit so rare, so partial, so disappointing.

And it is well to notice that every advance in civilization, every year of social growth, heightens and intensifies this call for the supernatural—this demand for an ulterior consummation in some other stage of life. This is what constitutes the fallacy of those who dream of a future progress in civilization which shall abolish the need to look beyond, by offering men, here on earth, a goal for their efforts, which shall satiate aspiration and absorb interest. How can it? What is the meaning of progress, of civilization? It means that the game of

life remains the same, only the stakes are doubled ; and the game, therefore, becomes more anxious than ever, for the risk is more terrible, and the loss more deadly.

Civilization multiplies possibilities. It widens the field open to us. It makes higher demands. But, then, by suggesting wider possibilities, it widens, also, the inevitable contrast between the chances open to us, and the doubtfulness and meagreness of their individual fulfilment. We learn more and more of what we might do ; and, so learning, the little that we actually accomplish shrinks into yet more pitiful contempt than before. Ever our dreams widen, ever our desires expand, ever our imagination ranges further afield ; but, nevertheless, the opportunity for action remains just what it was —confined to the same brief years, fettered by the same cramps, liable to the same irritating

obstacles, and stupid interruptions, and incalculable accidents.

The contrast, therefore, between what we are in fact, and what we feel it in us to be, must grow stronger and more bitter. In face of the vast illimitable world opened to our knowledge, the individual man dwindles down into ridiculous insignificance. It ceases to matter whether he, with his shadowy and fleeting efforts, attains to anything or no. The immense life outside him laughs at his demands upon it for fruition, for achievement. Yet fruition he must crave, and this, not, let us repeat, in the selfishness of egotism. To impute such a need to the mere craving of individual appetite, is both to caricature and to insult us. No: it is because man's whole reason must, of inner necessity, revolt against days of aimless waste, and unintelligible collapse,

and unnatural sterility. Just as, scientifically, he is forced to suppose that the world is rationally ordered; just as, morally, he is bound to claim that the ways of God should prove themselves worthy and wise; so, by the same radical necessity, he must ask that human life should arrive at some intelligible end.

But here, on earth, no such end manifests itself as practically sufficient or certain. Each step forward in civilization postpones any such consummation indefinitely. Ever it increases the task, without lengthening the time in which to accomplish it. So our great teacher, Robert Browning,¹ in the poem named after Cleon, in

¹ It is impossible to speak on the probational significance of human life without a thankful acknowledgment of the debt due to him, through whose masterful imagination this high theme, which once lent its serious beauty to Plato's "Republic," and yet again gave its austere dignity to Butler's "Analogy," has been redelivered to our generation.

whom he pictures the perfection of civilized man, makes him speak of this culture as a watch-tower, a treasure fortress, which the soul has built to overlook the flats of natural life. Yet, alas!

“The soul now climbs it, just to perish there,”

—to perish at the sight of a world of capability for joy, spread round it, meant for it, inviting it; and the soul craves it all; and still it may not taste of that wide enjoyment one jot more than it could when it knew so much less of it, ere it built its tower, and climbed up to look abroad. Therefore—

“Man sees the wider, but to sigh the more:

Most progress is most failure.”

Yes, the more gifted he is, the more disastrous is it for him to fail before half the gifts have been exercised—to fail just as he is daily learning more of the value of the gifts which he longs to use.

“ My fate is deadlier still than all,
In this—that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute ; my soul, intensified
By power and insight, more enlarged and keen ;
While every day my hair falls more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase,
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape,
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy.”

Yes ! that cry of the soul, as it feels the strong tides of spiritual life still brimming on the upward flow within it, while the niggardly tide of a bodily life has already drifted back on the ebb, down to the naked shoals, and doleful shallows of melancholy death,—that cry of the soul caught in the snare of an immense desire, which it is forbidden to enjoy,—that cry is bound to rise into yet fiercer agony. The progress of culture, far from abolishing the argument for immortality, will but sharpen its edge, will but intensify its appeal.

We speak too often and too much as if the motives for belief in another life lay only in our poverty and our misery, for which we need a consolation. But our human successes breed arguments at least as valid, and as impressive,—our poor successes that carry with them a sadder lesson of our limitation, and our impotence, than all our distresses. It is the ragged and fragmentary character of our best success that so emphatically disproves our consummation to be here on earth. The further our success goes, in civilizing and completing life, the more terribly incomplete does it show itself to be—the more dreadful yawns the gulf between our eternal aim and our temporary littleness. The wail of the Preacher has forestalled all the future increase of knowledge, for such increase can but deepen the pathos of his plaint. “I looked on all the labour of my

hands : and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit. As with the wise, so the foolish ; as with the man, so the beast : all go to one place ; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

And it is at this point that we see how absolutely we throw off the old taunt, that our belief in the supernatural destroys our interest, our zeal, our hope, our gladness in the world here at our feet, on earth. That melancholy refrain of the Psalmist and the Preacher, which must toll out its sadness like a passing bell, to all those who limit their vision to this earth, as the long centuries carry further the bitter antithesis between the art that is so lengthy and the life that is so short,—that melancholy refrain is turned for us into the roar and rush of happy marriage-bells—for us who see, in all this busy earth, nothing but the beginning of a promise, that has immortal

issues,—nothing but the decking of the Bride, that she may be ready for the Bridal—ready for all the immeasurable honour of the kingdom which hath no end.

Surely, a wholly new interest creeps over this poor human world of ours, if we once see in it the germ of unimaginable possibilities, the suggestion of all that is to be hereafter. So seen, it is no aged and weary traveller, tottering slowly down to the last end. It is a child still, with the fascination of a child all about it—the fascination of a life which is feeling its way forward, by start, by gleam, by sudden intuition, by experiment, by tentative trial, by flashes of rapid insight, by glances, by glimpses ; yes ! and by stumbles and falls, and shocks, and jolts, from out of which it still pulls itself together, and leaps up, and runs on yet ahead, not knowing whither, guessing, stopping, starting afresh, wondering,

reflecting, fearing, surprised, imagining, calculating; trying this way and that, baffled, resisted, blocked, seeking, hurrying, climbing, undermining, burrowing, emerging; ignorant of its powers, slowly discovering them; living by revelation, by disclosure of secrets, by unlooked-for gains, by sudden wind-falls, by blessed accidents, by startling good-haps; with eyes alert, with ears pricked, with hands busy to touch, try, explore, improve; with feet quick and ready; waiting, watching, listening ever for voices that call, and guide, and cry, and warn; finding, in its worst need, a Father's Hand, that holds it, and lifts it,—a Brother's Voice, that whispers hope,—a Spirit, that kindles flame afresh within its dead fires, and feeds it yet again with a food that is never consumed. This is human life, to the believer's eye. Even in its best and wisest forms, it is still a child-life, wistful,

prophetic, marvellous, suggestive ; a child-life, full of strange promise, but with all its achievements yet to come—to come in that great after-world for which the whole round of this age-long story of man is but a preparation, but a nursery, but a rehearsal, but an education.

Let us recount our gains from such a belief—our gains, I mean, in respect, not to that other land, but to the world at our feet, and before our eyes.

First, cheerfulness in the face of change. Change is so wearisome when it insists on going beyond what we ourselves want. There is such a sense of disappointing collapse when we have succeeded in bettering things, in effecting a reform, in attaining a goal, then to discover that the moment the end is touched it already has begun to change, to

move, to go further. In politics, especially, we are suffering from this cheerless disappointment. The good things of which men thirty years ago hoped so much, have been done only to show how much more remains to be done. The removal of a wrong serves only to give us leisure to observe unsuspected wrongs that are unremoved. And the very act of removing the old wrong has itself made new wrongs, new complications, new demands, new entanglements, new grievances. What before was unfelt is now urgent. For no change stops in itself; it sets other possible changes moving; it creates novel departures. So, with each great political or social ideal. Before realization, it occupies the entire scenery; it fills the hollow heaven with hope. But, once attained, lo! the motives to which it appeals shift from under it. Life seems to set its

currents into some new direction ; it moves away from the channel so carefully cut and grooved ; influences, of which that ideal took no account, perversely start up everywhere. Alas ! we may not rest. We must begin again. Decay has already touched that brave structure we had built. It is fast becoming obsolete under our eyes ; and the young men about us are talking some new language, and are on fire with some fresh hopes, to us strange and unmeaning. We thought ourselves in the van ; but we are already lagging in the rear. We are antiquated, we have lost the cue. This is what damps men's spirits.

But, what if this life is, all of it, but a beginning, and never an end ; all of it a suggestion of more beyond, none of it a goal attained ? Then each political fabric will be precious and sacred ; for it suggests something which we shall

find hereafter ; it gives a hint, a shadow, of that Heavenly citizenship, which shall complete all that is well begun here. We shall find it all there. But just because of that we are not to rest in it here. No suggestion of that vast society in Heaven exhausts its meaning. As soon as we have understood one suggestion, and seen our way to its realization, we are ready to receive another. Each is but a fragment of that great kingdom to be. We catch a glimpse of this or that feature of it, through each political achievement here. And ever there is more to learn. When the winds of change ruffle the smooth waters in whose stillness Heaven lay for us reflected, we are not made cheerless : we have seen the vision, we have learned its lesson, we can let it go. God sweeps it out of sight—not in contempt, but because He prepares for us another, and yet another picture of that

immeasurable glory of His kingdom in Heaven. We have affection for the old. It opened a door through which we saw how fair and free the citizens of Heaven move along its ordered ways. Now another door is ajar. Towards it we gaze with eager expectation, towards it we press with joyful content: for soon it will open; through it a fresh sight will be seen of that high freedom and of that sweet peace in Heaven, which is our home. And if we bore our part in opening the one door, we can cheerfully fall back while others press on first to throw open the new door, through which we shall peer into the unknown land.

So we gain cheerfulness in face of change. And we gain hope—hope, just where we most need it. For if the ideal, if completion is to be sought for here on earth, then how dismal, how despairing, is our view of those who, born in

these vast cities of ours—born in thousands, born in dark and sour dens, born out of the seed of sin, out of the fires of lust and drink ; born into a life that must be stricken and stunted, blind with ignorance, cursed with the horror of a loveless doom,—can make but such a pitiful fight of it here ; can, at their very best, attain so little ; and are swept so lightly down the black waters of crime and woe ! If this earth be their one home, how can we close our eyes to this hideous nightmare ?

But we, who believe that this life is, at best, but a germ, a start, a possibility, a discipline, can afford to broaden our hope beyond all our seeing.

True, indeed, our belief is full of severe, of terrible warnings to those who, having their opportunity, despise it—to those who, like Esau, treat their birthright lightly. That is

another and a very serious matter. If life is a discipline, it must also be a judgment—a judgment on those who, having the light, prefer the darkness. But we are speaking of those who seem, to our human eyes, to have no opportunities given them—no chance of success, no chance of winning their way to comely living. It is this deprivation which would be so hideous, if we arrested our view at this world, as it stands. But for these, for such as these, we, of the faith, do have infinite hope,—hope to which our ken can set no limits,—hope which passes out far beyond the bounds of the Christian Church, and covers all the swarming earth, and can touch the uncouth heathen, and the unnamed herds of perishing savages. A beginning may always have been made. Each soul, under the blackest depths of darkness, can have made some start, can have exercised some

judgment, can have taken some initial direction. Behind the fumes of drink, behind the cloud of crime, each may have made his struggle, have fought his fight, have proved a possibility, have manifested some germ of possible growth, kindness, purity; have been touched, at least, with some dim passion of penitence. And, if this is so, there is hope. If only something be begun—that is the one necessity. If only something be kept still possible—not made impossible by an act of rebellious determination; if only some door be not yet barred by wilful sin, then hope is alive. These unknown masses may be doing, in their measure, as well as we,—may be quite as ready as we, for the future handling of God. We, who know so much more, are liable to shut fast so many more doors against God than those who know so far less what they are about.

God may yet do great things with them, so long as He can secure in them some seed of future love and purity.

We gain cheerfulness, in face of change ; hope, in face of base and bad conditions ; and then we gain what is near akin to this last—joy, in face of failure.

Failure—what a joyless thing it is ! The weight of failure, that lies heavy upon a world, which seems, sometimes, made to fail ! Which is most depressing—the failure of splendid aims, wrecked by some infirmity, some blunder, some mistaken direction, some accident ; or the failure, immense and multitudinous, of nearly every other man or woman we meet—the failure to be what they ought to be ; the failure to make the best of their life ; the failure to do just what everybody, but they, see that they ought to do ; the failure to estimate rightly

their chances, to lay hold on their near happiness, to touch the obvious prize ; the failure to fulfil anticipations, hopes,—to correspond to what our love desires for them,—to give fulfilment to what we know of their own intentions,—to carry out their highest creeds—to be the example, the blessing, the joy, we looked for from them ?

Oh the weariness of this unceasing breakdown—the dreariness of discovering, again and again, the flaw that spoils all, the worm in the bud, the thorn under the flower, the shadow on the path, the rift in the lute ! It is the most melancholy of all human experiences ; and, reading it in others, we can dimly read it in ourselves—can become conscious of the failure that haunts us too ; of the perverse ingenuity with which we defeat our own good ; of the secret why, as we too clearly perceive, our zeal

does not win the point we expect,—why our efforts do not carry with them the sign of success.

Yes, seen by itself, as stopping in itself, failure is, indeed, most melancholy : but not to us, who believe ourselves to be in schooling, under preparation, for an after day. In our schooling, failure bears its part. It is no useless drag upon us. In failure lies our best lesson. It teaches, it trains, it shapes, it endows, quite as truly as our success. Nothing need be lost through failing, if only we be loyal to our lesson ; if only we be brave under the buffets of experience.

Fruit is not here ; but fruit may come hereafter—fruit in abundance, out of the very failure which pressed us down, and curtailed us, and sharply disciplined us here. Hereafter, it may be our failures that we shall bless most, as we see what they brought us. Who knows what is

going on, in secret, behind these very failures in others, which most provoke us? The soul is being tamed, broken, humiliated; but it may be receiving, also, its glorification. Anyhow, it will not be the failure which distresses us, but only the failure to use the failure to good purposes. Our failures—above all, our noble failures—are part and parcel of our spiritual history, of our spiritual growth. When we go before our God, the failures will go to the great account; they will be elements in the judgment; they will be as instrumental and effective as any of our successes, in determining our eternal lot.

“ Yes, all the world’s coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account.
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as man’s work, yet swelled the man’s amount.

“ Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act ;
Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;
All I could never be ;
All men ignored in me ;
That I am worth to God, Whose wheel the pitcher shaped.” ¹

Beloved, “ now are we the sons of God. It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Not yet—no; but the root of what we shall be hereafter is here, imbedded in earthly soil. “ Now are we the sons of God.” Now are we the germ of what we shall find ourselves in that far land of God. All, therefore, that we can learn of what we shall be hereafter, is to be sought here, and now, in our human lot, amid our fellows, in our common brotherhood. The hints of the glory to follow, the beginnings, the omens, the previsions, all are here, close about us, in human nature, in flesh and blood.

¹ “ Rabbi Ben Ezra,” by R. Browning.

How, then, shall we not turn to this poor earth of ours with hope, with zeal, with tenderness, with love? How shall we not clasp it tight and fast, and cling about it, and busy ourselves in its service, and wait eagerly on its ministry? We are, here, to learn our lesson, to prepare, to catch glimpses of the great manifestation. We would not surely fly our task, shirk our training. Rather, we would bury ourselves in it. We would surrender ourselves wholly to it. We would watch the secrets of human souls. We would seek, in our common citizenship, in this temporal city, the secret, and the wonder of that high citizenship, which will be theirs and ours, by God's good mercy, in the New Jerusalem, in the assembly of the firstborn, in the household of Heaven, in the city of our God.

Each and every human soul has a hint, a message, to give us, of what this Divine fellow-

ship might mean. Turn to them—look at them, learn of them. Turn to them, to all who are moving, together with you, towards this mighty manifestation. All are at work in a common task, set towards a single goal. Even now are they the sons of God, through Christ. What will they be in that day? Turn, look, watch, love. Go close in among them. Let hand hold hand. Let heart touch heart. Be ever asking, “What shall you and I be hereafter, my brother, my sister, if now we are the children of God?” Turn, above all, to those among whom the richest revelations of the Divine citizenship are to be found—to the poor and the needy, to the sick and the forlorn, to the loveless and the outcast, to the publican and the harlot, to the women that suffer, to the children that starve, to the blind and the maimed, to the agonized and the dying. With them lies

our portion. From them we can catch the secret. They have most to teach us of that kingdom to come ; for He Who is its King said, "Blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are the mourners : theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." No !—but if, hereafter, we are to become like Christ, Whom we shall see as He is, then our only preparation lies in being here on earth fashioned after the likeness of Him Who was found in the fashion of a man, and took our flesh and blood, that in Him we might see the image of the glory that should follow. Press to Him, then, learn of Him—of Him, a Man among men, Who gave Himself up to doing good, and was the Friend of sinners, and drew near to men by compassion, by fellowship, by sympathy, by service, yea, by offering His very

life for the safety of His sheep. Learn of Him, Who brought deliverance to captives, and light to the blind, and comfort to the sorrowful, and life to the dead. Learn of Him, Who bids us be among our brethren as they that serve: even as He "came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

So living, in the fashion of the New Man, in the light of Christ, we may pray that, hereafter, though we know not the mystery of that stupendous change which shall creep over us, yet it may be but a growth in likeness to Him, Whom then we shall see as He is; and death be but a passage "from glory into glory, in the Face of Jesus Christ."

THE END.

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